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LETTER ON THE SUBJECT OF PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATIONS FOR ADMISSION TO
THE STUDY OF PROFESSIONS.

(Printed by order of the Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction.)

SHERBROOKE, 29th January, 1883.

WILLIAM WHITE, ESQ.,
Sherbrooke.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am not about to address you officially, for I am not authorised to do so, yet I know you are so much interested in the question of education in this Province, that I cannot but feel (occupying as you do the highly honourable and important position of Notary of the Quebec Bar) that you ought to be made aware of the desires of the Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction in the matter of the examination of candidates for admission to study the professions in this Province. I wish at once to state that the Protestant Committee do not in any way desire to interfere with the education of Roman Catholics. The two Committees of the Council of Public Instruction have the same object in view but they work on different lines.

The Protestant educational system may be classified into three grades, viz., Common Schools, High Schools and Universities. With the limited means at the disposal of the Committee, they are endeavouring gradually to raise the tone of the High Schools. The Common Schools demand a great deal of thoughtful care in their administration, but hitherto they have been almost exclusively under the control of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and the Universities, although receiving grants of public money, lie beyond the inspecting power of the Committee. Regular returns of their work and numbers are sent periodically to the Government, and they are worthy of the great confidence reposed in them by the public. But the High Schools, or Academies, as they are called in country parts, have been in a most unsatisfactory condition. The Committee have laboured earnestly to raise their tone and to fit them for the work which the country demands of them. I do not wish to trouble you with an account of their short-comings and of the efforts of the Protestant Committee to improve them—suffice it to say that the aim of the Committee is to make the Academies the means whereby young men may prepare themselves for the study of professions and for entering the Universities, by giving them the ground-work of a liberal education, such as may qualify them for public life, no matter what a man's special calling may be. One of the most serious difficulties the Committee have had to encounter arises from the powers possessed by the several professional bodies to examine candidates for the permission to enter on professional study. This is a very different thing from the professional examination itself for admission to practice. With this latter the Committee have no wish to interfere; it is entirely outside of their province. But as to the admission to study, they feel that the best preparation a young man can have is a broad, liberal education without "cram," such as will draw out the faculties and cultivate thought and observation. This style of training is equally applicable and useful to the intending student of Law, of Medicine, of Engineering and other professions, including even Divinity.

Under the present system there is no uniformity of plan or subject, no trained body of Examiners, and in the uncertainty which prevails, students are led to search previous sets of questions and to prepare themselves by a system of "cram."

But further there is a great practical difficulty in the fact that no Academy teacher can give attention to students preparing for different professions, and at the same time attend to ordinary school work. Under such a demand any educational system will break down. The plan of the Committee is to have an Examining Board of trained teachers of experience, who may be appointed by the Government on the recommendation of the Committee with, if necessary, the concurrence of the professional bodies. Some such plan would meet the requirements of the case, provided the subjects taught in the Academies and High Schools formed the ground work of the examinations, and it would be of course open at any time to the professional bodies to recommend certain objects of study. The co-operation of the professional bodies would be welcomed by the Committee and would greatly strengthen their hands.

The adoption of some such system would give a higher tone to education and secure a higher class of teachers, and the evils of the "cram" system would be avoided. The Committee moreover insist very strongly on the absolute necessity of recognizing the University Degree as in itself a qualification for the entrance on the study of a profession. The two Protestant Universities, McGill and Bishop's College, are working to increase the quality of the degree. They are united on the subjects for matriculation in Arts, and although there are subsequent differences, so as to satisfy different classes of minds, yet both are earnest to require good work from their students. If the professional bodies will not accept men who have devoted three or four years of their strength to the study of Arts and Science, not in technicalities but on broad fundamental grounds, there would seem to be very little room for Universities at all in the Province of Quebec.

Commanding these few observations to your kind notice and attention,

I am, my dear Sir, very truly yours,

R. W. HENKEL.